

# Violence Against Women

<http://vaw.sagepub.com/>

---

## Women's Shelters in Turkey : A Qualitative Study on Shortcomings of Policy Making and Implementation

Cagla Diner and Sule Toktas

*Violence Against Women* 2013 19: 338

DOI: 10.1177/1077801213486258

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/19/3/338>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Violence Against Women* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://vaw.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://vaw.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - May 14, 2013

[What is This?](#)

# Women's Shelters in Turkey: A Qualitative Study on Shortcomings of Policy Making and Implementation

Violence Against Women  
19(3) 338–355

© The Author(s) 2013

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1077801213486258

vaw.sagepub.com



Cagla Diner<sup>1</sup> and Şule Toktaş<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Despite a long history of women's movements and policy-making efforts to ameliorate women's status in Turkey, the number and quality of women's shelters are far from sufficient. This article aims to reveal the shortcomings of shelter policy through the lens of those "at work" on this important social issue using a qualitative research design. Forty semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted with municipal administrative officials, state social workers, and employees of civil society organizations that run shelters. The research findings reveal that there is a lack of effective authority that has the willpower to combat violence against women, and that it is difficult to keep shelters secure in a patriarchal society away from the male gaze. Furthermore, results indicate that there has been an erosion of social services provided by the state.

## Keywords

domestic violence, social workers, women in Turkey, women's shelters

## Introduction

Violence against women has been one of the major focuses of women's activism in Turkey as the frequency of violence against women is high. According to national statistics, approximately 4 out of 10 women who have been married in Turkey have experienced physical violence by a partner at least once in their lives, while 30% of women who reported partner abuse have been subject to both physical and sexual violence by their husbands or male partners (Jansen, Yüksel, & Çağatay, 2009).

<sup>1</sup>Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey

## Corresponding Author:

Cagla Diner, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Kadir Has University, 34083, Cibali, Istanbul, Turkey.

Email: cagla.diner@khas.edu.tr

Women are also being killed by their families in the name of honor. According to a report published by the Human Rights Office at the Prime Ministry of Republic of Turkey, between 2003 and 2007, there have been 1,148 homicides committed in the name of honor (T. C. Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı, 2008). Young women and children are not protected from male violence either. The crime statistics compiled by the General Directorate of Security show that 1,744 women below the age of 18 were killed in incidents categorized as “violent crimes” between 2000 and 2005 (TBMM Araştırma Komisyon Raporu, 2006).

Studies have indicated that there is a demand in Turkey for institutions that can protect women from male violence. A number of studies note that women see the state as the prime institution responsible for protecting women from male violence, and they want women’s shelters to be available for them when needed. Such women believe that this service should be provided by official authorities and they support the funding of shelters through taxes (Altınay & Arat, 2008; International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 2000). Moreover, women who have used shelter facilities at least once in their lives have a positive perception of their experiences in the shelters. A study conducted about women who stayed at shelters reports that they found shelters very valuable and felt happier and stronger at the shelters than in their homes (Yıldırım, 1998).

Turkey’s international treaty obligations also require the establishment of women’s shelters. Turkey ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 and the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which allows individual women to submit claims of violations of rights protected under CEDAW. Likewise, Turkey’s European Union (EU) membership process calls for improved women’s rights, including their right to live free from violence. In 1998, the European Parliament’s Committee on the Rights of Women decided that there should be at least one women’s shelter for every 7,500 female residents (Women Against Violence Europe, 1998). Since 1998, the annual progress reports on Turkey released by the European Commission, which monitors the reforms undertaken by the Turkish state for the fulfillment of membership criteria, repeatedly have denounced the high levels of violence against women. The reports recommend increasing the availability and accessibility of services to prevent violence against women and protect women from violence. In particular, the reports prepared since 2004 have included more extensive coverage on the issue each year, and the tone of the reports has grown increasingly critical of the fact that there are insufficient numbers of women’s shelters.

In comparison to European countries, the shelters for women living under the threat of violence in Turkey are inadequate in terms of capacity and quality. In 2005, the number of women’s shelters and counseling centers for every 10,000 residents was 3.52 in Luxemburg, 1.5 in the Netherlands, 0.84 in Germany, 0.53 in Portugal, 0.48 in Belgium, and 0.11 in Norway, but only 0.04 in Turkey (Hagemann-White & Bohn, 2007). In 2005, the Turkish government issued Municipality Law No. 5393, which suggests that municipalities with populations above 50,000 open women’s shelters. If the law had been fully implemented, today there would be a total of 1,400 women’s

shelters in the country. However, by 2010, there were a mere 58 women's shelters in the country, with capacities ranging from 8 to 50 women, for a total capacity of 1,354 (Şiddet gören kadına yeni hayat, 2010).<sup>1</sup> A similar picture is prevalent regarding women's counseling centers, emergency stations, victim help groups, community centers, and call centers. Given the *multilevel efforts of the central government, municipal governments, and civil society organizations, and the use of a wide range of means, such as* legal measures, financial support, international pressure, and campaigns by women's organizations, one would expect to see more women's shelters to meet the existing demand rather than the scarcity that we have today.

This puzzle led us to explore in-depth the reasons for this inadequacy and to uncover the obstacles and difficulties that impede the establishment and running of a sufficient number of high-quality women's shelters in Turkey. Rather than focusing on what has been happening, or not happening, at the higher echelons of the state, we sought to gain a better understanding of the experiences of those who work at the mid-level, between central policy making and local policy implementation. How do those who work in the establishment and running of shelters explain the reasons behind this failure? This is the question motivating this research. Hence, in light of the data collected through a qualitative study, the article discusses the shortcomings of shelter policy in Turkey as witnessed by the personnel in charge of administrating shelters. In other words, the administrative staff of women's shelters—that is, social workers, managers, administrators, supervisors, and directors—have provided us with the means to identify deficiencies of policy making and implementation regarding women's shelters.

## Method

A qualitative research methodology was used to glean answers to the research question. Semistructured, in-depth interviews were conducted with service providers who work actively in the process of establishment and/or running of women's shelters and who have first-hand experience in this process. Purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique, was used; cases selected were those that were thought to be especially informative for our purpose.

In Turkey, there are three main types of institutions that run women's shelters: civil society institutions, local governments (municipalities), and social service institutions affiliated with the General Directorate of Social Services and Protection of Children (SHÇEK).<sup>2</sup> At the state level, since 1990 SHÇEK has been running shelters called "Women's Guesthouses" for survivors of domestic violence. At the community level, there are municipally run shelters in some larger towns. At the civil society level, there are a few NGO-run shelters for women, some of which were the result of the feminist movement that arose in the 1980s. Accordingly, study participants were employees and volunteers from civil society organizations, local governments, and SHÇEK—the three types of institutions that run women's shelters in Turkey. Istanbul and Diyarbakır were the main locales of the fieldwork, as they are the two major cities where women's activism is highest in Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

In total, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted. Of these, 16 were with municipality staff, such as deputy mayors, as well as directors of such departments as social services, social and cultural issues, and family and women's affairs; directors of women's shelters were also interviewed. We selected those municipalities in Istanbul and Diyarbakır that currently run shelters or that are about to establish one. Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of various civil society organizations that run women's shelters or women's counseling centers that provide psychological and legal counseling services to women survivors of violence. Some of these are general shelters that accommodate women escaping from honor crimes, domestic violence, and sexual abuse, whereas others are specialized shelters for women with specific needs and backgrounds (such as female minors or victims of the traffic in women).

To understand the dynamics of policy making and policy implementation at the state level, we held 11 in-depth interviews with SHÇEK staff who either administer women's shelters or conduct face-to-face work with women staying at the shelters.<sup>4</sup> They were mainly mid-level officials such as directors of women's shelters or social workers responsible for counseling women at SHÇEK provincial offices.

Table 1 provides further information about the study participants, including the names and places of the institutions in which they work. The table also includes information on the number of participants interviewed from each institution as well as the research site.

As stated, this research used semistructured interviews to attain its goals. The interviews lasted about 1 hr on average, ranging between 35 and 90 min. Except for those conducted in Adana, all 40 interviews took place at the offices of the institutions, associations, and foundations under survey between September 2009 and July 2010. We had prepared a set of questions beforehand to structure the interviews, although we retained the flexibility to add or change questions depending on the specific institution for whom the interviewee worked. The interviewers were the authors themselves. The main questions of the interview guide can be seen in Table 2.

All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and transcribed before proceeding with the qualitative data analysis. The authors, who are also the interviewers, used thematic analysis and did the coding themselves. In the first round, common themes and points raised were identified with an open coding technique; in the second round, divergence of views and standpoints of the interviewees were highlighted. Themes were identified in the first round by cutting and sorting; quotes that seemed important were identified and cut out, making sure to maintain the context from which the quote was taken. Afterwards, these quotes were stacked with similar quotes to render detectable divergence of views and interviewees' differing standpoints. In this way, the themes and subthemes that characterize the experience of informants emerged. The themes and subthemes that were selected to be included in the results section were determined through discussion and the full agreement of the authors, who worked collectively. In the second round, a compare-and-contrast approach was used in order to understand the ways in which the texts and coding related to them were either similar to or different from each other. The codes and hence the passages of texts were compared both within and across each and every interview/interviewee.

**Table 1.** Study Participants.

Type of institution	Name of the institution	Number of interviewees	Research site
Municipality	Municipality of Kadıköy, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Municipality of Pendik, Istanbul	2	Istanbul
	Municipality of Üsküdar, Istanbul	2	Istanbul
	Municipality of Şişli, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Municipality of Küçükçekmece, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Municipality of Eyüp, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Municipality of Zeytinburnu, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Municipality of Beşiktaş, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Metropolitan Municipality of Diyarbakır, Diyarbakır	5	Diyarbakır
	Municipality of Başlar, Diyarbakır	1	Diyarbakır
Civil Society Organization	Şahmaran Women's Solidarity and Research Center, Istanbul	2	Istanbul
	Istanbul Branch of Amnesty International Turkey, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Young Women's Shelter Association, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Association for Compassion, Solidarity and Human Rights, Istanbul	1	Istanbul
	Foundation for the Development of Human Resources, Istanbul	2	Istanbul
	Kamer Foundation, Diyarbakır	2	Diyarbakır
	Association of Selis Women's Counseling Center, Diyarbakır	2	Diyarbakır
	Turkey Local Agenda 21 Program Diyarbakır City Council, Diyarbakır	1	Diyarbakır
SHÇEK	SHÇEK, Adana	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Ankara	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Bursa	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Denizli	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Eskişehir	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Istanbul	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Kastamonu	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Kırıkkale	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Kocaeli	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Mersin	1	Adana
	SHÇEK, Nevşehir	1	Adana
Municipality, Civil Society Organization, SHÇEK	Istanbul, Diyarbakır, Adana, Ankara, Bursa, Denizli, Eskişehir, Istanbul, Kastamonu, Kırıkkale, Kocaeli, Mersin, and Nevşehir	Total: 40	Istanbul, Diyarbakır, Adana

**Table 2.** Interview Guide.

---

Are the laws and regulations regarding women's shelters sufficient?
Do you think that additional legal documentation is needed to meet the demands of the women's shelter in practice?
How do you define a perfect women's shelter?
Do you think there should be separate shelters for specific types of women survivors of violence or should women from different backgrounds and with different problems should stay together in shelters?
What are the institutions that you are frequently in touch with and how is the relationship with these institutions and their personnel?
How is the relation between the civil society, municipalities and SHÇEK?
Do you think there is sufficient cooperation between the institutions that work in the field of combating violence against women?
Are there any conflicts between these institutions?
Do you have sufficient financial means to run a shelter?
What is the budget to run a medium-level shelter?
Is there a specific national policy for shelters or is it ad hoc and dependent on the government, political party, or the authority in charge?
Do you think that establishing women's shelters can be used to attract votes during political campaigning during elections?

---

## Results

This section will present the results obtained in this study regarding the shortcomings of policy making and implementation concerning women's shelters in Turkey. The obstacles and difficulties that are faced by those who actively work in the establishment and running of shelters will be described under headings that cover the most significant issues identified by the interviewees.

### *Instead of Protecting Women, They Try to Protect the Family*

One of the most important findings of this research is that the state institutions involved in combating violence against women try to protect the family rather than the women. The laws and policies designed to support women and combat domestic violence contradict the prevailing mentality within society and state institutions, which support the integrity of the family. The priority attached to the family may prevent, from time to time, the development of women's rights or status within society. That is, it is not women's problems or the violence against women that are prioritized, but the integrity of the family. For example,

The structure of the family in Turkey does not allow us to have many women's shelters. In Turkey, it is believed that the integrity of family should be protected. (Eyüp Municipality, Women's Shelter, Istanbul, Administrator/Social Worker)<sup>5</sup>

Some of the interviewees pointed out that since the decision makers, administrators, and officials are mainly men, the policies of both state offices and municipalities

fail to take women's problems into account. Hence, the policies reflect the mentality of men. They pointed to the dominance of men in state cadres and at the level of local government,

I don't think the state does not have the money; it must be related to the mentality. Since it is generally men who are in charge, it is their mentality. They wonder why women would need such a place. They do not think that there is a need, I guess. (Zeytinburnu Municipality, AKDEM, Istanbul, Director)

The state administration in Turkey is conservative. Thanks to the process of integration with the EU, very good laws have been passed; however, if you look at the prevailing mentality of provincial directorates [of SHÇEK] you would see that all of them are conservative. Many of the directors think that the place of the woman is her home. (SHÇEK, Women's Shelter, Kırkkale, Administrator and Social Worker)

One of the points that many interviewees made was that the policymakers who have the authority to use the state's economic and administrative resources to combat violence against women do not see domestic violence as a problem. Rather, they perceive violence against women as something ordinary and normal within the society. That is, domestic violence is so entrenched in Turkish society that combating it is considered almost impossible. For example,

The decision makers do not think that this is really necessary or they do not want to go into the trouble of doing this. They don't think that domestic violence is a real problem. If there is a problem that concerns men, for example, if there is violence among football fans and someone dies as a result of it, they take it seriously and take many precautions. When a woman's life is at stake, they do not take that as seriously. How many women are killed in a single day? It is as if it is very normal when women die. (NGO, Şahmaran Women's Solidarity and Research Center, Istanbul, Volunteer)

In sum, it seems that the shortage of shelters cannot be explained by simple lack of concern about domestic violence on the part of the state, but rather an unwillingness to combat domestic violence through the establishment of women's shelters. This is because those who have the power to use the state's economic and administrative resources, and who happen to be predominantly men, fear that the creation of alternatives for women who want to escape from the violent environment in their families may weaken the institution of the family and, consequently, weaken the dominant status of men within the family.

### *If Our Mayor Goes and a New Party Comes to Power, Things Would Change. If I Leave, Our Shelter Would be Shut Down*

Because the state institutions that have the authority and resources to combat violence against women do not regard domestic violence as a serious problem, the establishment and running of women's shelters cannot be institutionalized. Women's shelters



administered by municipality governments constantly run the risk of closing because shelter services are not institutionalized and are dependent instead on the personality of those currently holding office. The same is true for the shelters run by civil organizations because there is no institutionalized mechanism to provide funding for them. If certain mayors or provincial governors happen to be responsive to the issue of domestic violence, then they may allocate some funds to a shelter (either municipally run or NGO run) and might even support campaigns and projects to raise awareness about violence against women. However, when they leave office, it is never certain whether the administrators who follow them will keep the shelters running. A new mayor might decide to reallocate the funds for the shelter to a home for the aged, or a new provincial governor might have other priorities and decide to use the funds that used to support an NGO-run shelter for some other purpose. As one Deputy Mayor of a municipality government in Istanbul put it,

If our Mayor goes and a new party comes to power, things would change. If I leave, our shelter would be shut down. (Şişli Municipality, Istanbul, Deputy Mayor)

It is interesting that the employees of the women's center of the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality (DİKASUM) think very differently. When asked whether the shelter would be kept running if the municipality decided to apply budgetary restrictions and shut down the shelter, the head of the center said that they would raise hell in such a case. They believed that the gains achieved by the struggle of women's organizations and the pressure they put on the municipality government would ensure that the shelter would be kept running, even if the political party or mayor that administers the municipality changed. This point, in a way, exemplifies the significance of the women's movement in pressuring those in office to adopt decisions that are pro-women.

### *The State Does Not Allocate Sufficient Funds to Protect Women*

Interviews with directors of SHÇEK's women's shelters, municipality personnel in charge of social services, and representatives of civil society organizations that work on the issue of violence against women all showed that one of the most important factors inhibiting the provision of more shelters for women is inadequate funding allocated to combat domestic violence. One hundred percent of the interviewees believe that the state has the money, but that it chooses not to allocate the money for the provision of services to women. They argue that it is the duty of the state to provide shelter services and allocate more funds for this service, so the state is not fulfilling its responsibilities in their eyes. For instance,

There is a big discrepancy between the budget allocated for orphanages, the disabled, and the elderly, and for women's shelters at SHÇEK. This is the main problem. The funds to provide services to women should be increased. (SHÇEK, Women's Shelter, Ankara, Manager and Social Worker)

Today, the state spent millions for the Olympic Stadium. The state has money. If Turkey wants, it can open 10,000 shelters in a week's time. (NGO, the Association for Compassion, Solidarity and Human Rights, Istanbul, Director)

In addition to the point about the general inadequacy of funding, many interviewees also stated that the state should be supporting the shelters that are run by women's NGOs. Thus, they argue that the state should have a greater responsibility in provision of services to women, criticizing the neoliberal policies that have led to budget cuts in welfare programs and increased reliance on projects funded by national and/or international NGOs. In the words of one interviewee,

Recently, we have observed that the state, municipality governments and governors carry out their tasks by relying on funding from projects [funded by national and international NGOs]. Instead of fulfilling their own responsibilities, they find funding from outside. What is the duty of a social state? It is to employ these people and support them. Right now, these services are provided through projects and the state has become lazy. You propose a project and get funding. (NGO, the Association of Selis Women's Counseling Center, Diyarbakır, Volunteer)

Civil society organizations especially suffer from a lack of funding to maintain the sustainability of shelters. As a representative of an NGO states:

The state does not pay anything to civil society organizations. There is no budget. When there is nothing in the budget allocated for shelter expenses, how can you open a shelter? With projects [funded by national and international NGOs]? Their duration is one year. What will you do after one year? You open a restaurant where you sell food produced by the women staying at the shelters, but would it be enough? (NGO, the Kamer Foundation, Diyarbakır, Project Manager)

The problem about the allocation of funds for women's shelters in the national budget and budgets of individual municipalities is associated with the deficiencies of certain laws. For example, as mentioned earlier, the wording of the Municipality Law regarding the establishment of shelters in larger towns does not make it a requirement, only a suggestion. Furthermore, when there are no funds specifically allocated for women's problems in the budget, the laws become ineffective. The implementation of laws requires a certain budget; yet, while according to the laws certain services should be provided to protect women from violence, there is no budget allocated for the provision of these protective and rehabilitative services. In the words of one interviewee,

This famous Circular #17 issued by the Prime Ministry in 2006 states that the administrative districts, the Ministry of Education, municipality governments, and other institutions responsible for children and women are responsible for supporting and allocating funds for women's shelters. However, since the state does not allocate funds itself, nobody does it. The circular gives a directive; it says it would be good if these institutions do this and do that, but it does not designate any institution that will provide the funds. (NGO, the Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation, Istanbul, Women's Shelter Director)

### *Cooperation and Coordination Between Institutions Is Inadequate*

The state's reluctance to regard domestic violence as a problem that requires a response not only leads to its failure to allocate funds to women's shelters but also leads to organizational deficiencies. Many interviewees stated that one of the most important problems that they face in the provision of shelter services for women is the lack of information sharing and coordination between different shelters, counseling centers, and call centers.

Many interviews revealed the lack of and therefore the need for a central body or coordinating unit that would help establish a network linking all the institutions that work on the issue of violence against women. This center, according to these interviewees, would be an authority that would develop policies aiming to combat violence against women, resolve problems related to women's shelters, gather information from all shelters, and act as a channel of communication between shelters. The same central body would also keep track of women moving in and out of shelters as well as the spaces available in each shelter. Municipality interviewees, in particular, explicitly voiced this need:

We believe that there should be a single authority that is in charge of attending to the various needs of women's shelters; this job can be done in the healthiest way possible if the power resides in one such authority. What is important is having a single authority that is in charge of all the problems of shelters, such as provision of security, psychological and counseling services, budgeting and administration in general. That is, it would be healthier to have an institution that attends to all the problems of women's shelters, from A to Z . . . We are having difficulty because of this weakness in the administrative mechanism; there should be laws to overcome this difficulty. (Beşiktaş Municipality, İstanbul, Department Head)

The central administration should be in charge of coordination of services; it should establish a phone line, a call center, for women to call when they are subject to violence. It should be coordinating the placement of women in the shelters. Nobody other than this coordination center should know the locations of the women; the information should be kept confidentially in the files of this center. (Kadıköy Municipality, İstanbul, Department Head)

### *It Is Not Easy to Ensure the Security of Shelters. This Is a Hard Task*

The basic goal of a shelter is to provide security for those women under the threat of violence, attacks, homicide, honor crime, or any type of physical assault that might be directed against women by their male relatives, partners, or husbands. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that shelters are well protected and the women who live in them are actually secure. However, when there is no authority with sufficient economic and administrative resources that accepts the responsibility to combat violence against women, issues that need major organization, such as the provision of security for women's shelters with the involvement of the police force, become larger problems that cannot be tackled easily. Our field research revealed very clearly that one of the major problems faced by administrators of women's shelters is related to maintaining the security of the women and employees at shelters. This was a critical theme that

most of the interviewees emphasized frequently and repeatedly in the interviews. Women staying at the shelters and the employees of shelters are under the threat of violence because often the men from whom the women escaped attempt an organized attack on the shelter. These men do not refrain from using their resources and networks in order to find the woman they are looking for and extract her from the shelter. It is a very difficult task to keep the location of a shelter secret. Neighboring shop owners or households may reveal the shelter's location to anybody who asks. Moreover, most municipalities and women's organizations do not find the police reliable; they believe that sometimes the police are the source of the security problem because policemen may even reveal the address of the shelter to people such as male family members searching for the women who sought refuge there.

Provision of security is a major issue for municipalities when they are considering whether or not to establish a shelter because the lives of the sheltered women and the employees are at stake. Municipalities are thus discouraged from establishing women's shelters because they fear that they will not be able to provide security for the shelters. Some interviewees explained that the reason why so few shelters have been established, as suggested by the municipal law, is the difficulty of providing security for such shelters. The following excerpts clearly illustrate these concerns:

Local governments do not establish women's shelters because of the difficulty with the provision of security. Most municipality governments do not have any experience in this, and they may think that they do not want to take on this burden. (Pendik Municipality, Istanbul, Department Head)

Suppose a group from one of the women's family raids a shelter and this incident appears in the press . . . They would blame the municipality for having failed to protect the woman. Most institutions do not want to establish shelters because it is a big responsibility. (Üsküdar Municipality, Istanbul, Deputy Mayor)

Those municipality governments that do not establish women's shelters don't want to take such a big responsibility; it is risky for them. Why is it risky? We sometimes meet obsessive, sick men who are looking for their wives and who do not believe us and insist although we tell him that his wife is not here. This is the risky part; at the end of the day, the woman is under our custody. If something happens to her, we are legally responsible and it will also negatively affect our reputation. (Küçükçekmece Municipality, Istanbul, Women's Shelter Director)

Officials and social workers at SHÇEK shared these concerns over security with those working for the municipalities, although they said that the shelters run by the SHÇEK are better able, in comparison with those run by municipalities, to provide security to women under the threat of violence. Many interviewees noted that SHÇEK shelters are preferred, especially in dangerous cases such as honor crimes, where a gang is often chasing a woman to kill her in the name of family honor. Some directors of SHÇEK shelters have indicated their skepticism about shelters run by municipality governments because of the possibility that municipality governments might fail to ensure the security of women's shelters. The following excerpts emphasize this point:

Our institution [SHÇEK] can keep a woman more secure than the shelters of municipality governments. If a woman is at high risk, we do not want to accommodate her in a shelter run by a municipality; we try not to do that. Everybody knows the location of municipality shelters. (SHÇEK, Women's Shelter, Kocaeli, Social Worker)

The municipality governments think that running women's shelters is difficult . . . mostly because shelters need to be under constant surveillance. The municipality government may have the money, personnel and other resources, but the fact that it has to provide continuous security may be a discouraging factor for it. (SHÇEK, Women's Shelter, Nevşehir, Social Worker)

In discussions about the problem of security provision, the need for a central authority that provides coordination and information exchange between shelters run by different organizations and related units surfaces once again.

### *I Think the Biggest Problem Is the Shortage of Personnel*

The problems experienced by women's shelters have also been exacerbated by consolidation of neoliberalism and increasing privatization in Turkey in the last decade. Previously in Turkey, being a civil servant meant having a lifelong, secure job with relatively good health care and retirement benefits. Since the state started to implement neoliberal economic policies in the post-1980 period, it has begun to see these public servants as a burden on the state budget. Especially after the 2001 crisis, Turkey undertook various structural adjustment programs in its public administration and public finance structure. These programs were intended to decrease the budgetary costs of public servants with lifetime employment contracts and expensive benefits. The emphasis on the issue of personnel shortage by many directors of SHÇEK shelters reflects this recent change in the employment structure of the state. One of the directors stated explicitly,

The state has been changing along with the process of privatization. The policy regarding employment of public servants is a good example of this. Right now, SHÇEK subcontracts some of the services it needs: cleaning services, catering services, personnel services. The idea is to subcontract the services of psychologists and social workers as well. (SHÇEK, Women's Shelter, Istanbul, Social Worker)

Many of the interviewees working at various offices of SHÇEK in the field of combating violence against women also mentioned the problem of personnel shortages, which they encounter frequently. In particular, they drew attention to the fact that the state wants them to run the shelters with just a few personnel, mentioning that the state refused to employ full-time employees with qualifications in social services or related disciplines, although this is what the shelters need.

Representatives of civil society organizations also drew attention to the need for qualified and reliable personnel. While some noted the high cost of employing trained and full-time personnel, others talked about the necessity of working with professionals rather than volunteers because working with survivors of violence requires things

to be done in a timely manner. Hence, this kind of work cannot accommodate the flexibility that volunteers demand. There may be times when survivors are in need of urgent support and there are no volunteers around. Furthermore, social workers who work with survivors of violence should have special training rather than be short-term and irregular volunteers. This point was raised by an NGO representative who trains volunteers and employees, and by a director of the department in charge of women's problems at a municipality:

We had to train our own personnel. We need to provide continuous education on how to work with survivors of different types of violence and also to develop gender sensitivity among our personnel. (NGO, the Foundation for the Development of Human Resources, Istanbul, Director)

Human resources are important. A very professional and specialized service is required. The employees should be aware of the difficulties of this job and be sensitive to women's issues. In addition, they need to be very giving and sacrificing. (Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, DİKASUM, Diyarbakır, Department Head)

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Although recently there have been studies demonstrating the prevalence of violence against women in Turkey (Jansen et al., 2009) and its adverse effects on women's health and lives as well as how women cope with the problem (Ergöçmen, Üner, Abbasoğlu, & Gökçen, 2009; Tezcan, Yavuz, & Tunçkanat, 2009), to date there are no studies that look into how women's shelters are governed. Reflecting on the experiences of those who are running women's shelters, this research is a contribution to the study of violence against women in Turkey. By examining the policy shortcomings of shelters through in-depth interviews with mid-level administrators who actively work in the establishment and running of shelters, this article offers an angle different from studies that focus on service receivers (the survivors of violence) and top-level policy makers (high-level politicians, bureaucrats, and decision makers). Moreover, the results obtained from the field research in Diyarbakır have provided insight into the policy issues relating to women's shelters, as it is a province where feminist activism is high, local government collaboration with women's organizations is intense, and substantial experience in combating violence against women has been gained. The field research in Istanbul, the other research site, produced significant results for an urban setting where there is a wide variety of women's organizations, including one of the country's oldest, most experienced, and well-organized organizations for combating violence against women. Yet there were certain limitations to the study. Including other regions of Turkey such as the Black Sea coast, Central Anatolia, and the Aegean region in the study would have enriched the study and increased its robustness, specifically because we make certain generalizations about shelter policy in the country as a whole. A study that incorporates the perspectives of high-ranking bureaucrats, politicians, and decision makers on

women's shelters could yield additional insights that this research may have missed as a result of its design.

Taking into account its limitations, this study nonetheless has revealed that despite all the rhetoric in Turkey on the need to advance women's rights, including the right to security and the right to live free from violence, whether as part of the EU membership process or as part of the country's ambitions for Westernization and modernization, a coordination mechanism that would mobilize the state's financial as well as administrative resources for this purpose is lacking. Certain laws and regulations that push for advancement in women's rights have been passed. Two of the most significant laws in this regard are the 2005 Turkish Municipality Law No. 5393, which suggests that municipalities with a population above 50,000 open women's shelters, and the 1998 Family Protection Law No. 4320,<sup>6</sup> which provides for legislation to protect women from violence by keeping batterers from the residences of battered women. However, implementation of these laws has lagged (European Commission, 2009). The research findings of the current study illustrate that there is a lack of effective authority—whether civilian, in the sense of a strong, deliberate, or influential women's movement, or official, in the sense of a powerful ministry, bureaucracy, or agency responsible for women's issues—that will enforce laws and regulations, pool funds, and push for the establishment of a mechanism to coordinate the institutions involved in establishing and running shelters. Without such an authority that has the willpower and determination to combat violence against women, the institutionalization of women's shelters does not seem likely.

The study has also revealed that this lack of authority and willpower is partly due to the patriarchal mentality prevailing in state administrative organs. According to the respondents, the politicians and bureaucrats who hold the authority and position to establish mechanisms to protect women's rights and ensure women's security are mostly men who are indifferent to the realities of women's daily lives. In addition, domestic violence is not seen as a problem to be tackled; the protection and well-being of the traditional family unit is prioritized over the protection of woman from domestic violence. The mentality of the police is similar to that of the policy makers, bureaucrats, and politicians. Interviewees attached great importance to the outlook of the police because the police are supposed to be the front line in the official response to the battering of women. The interviewees reported that some police officers in Turkey do not refrain from revealing the location of a shelter to the men who are looking for a sheltered woman, thereby putting the women and the employees at the shelter in danger. The fact that state officials generally adopt an inappropriately gender-neutral approach, that they fail to take into account the critical factor of the genders of the victims and abusers and prioritize the protection of the family unit over the protection of women is not unique to Turkey; scholars writing in other parts of the world have mentioned this point as well (Ferraro, 2005; Loseke & Cahill, 2005; Schneider, 2000; Stanko, 1990). As long as women do not take their place in positions of power and in decision-making posts, public policies are likely to remain gender biased because women's interests and concerns cannot be adequately represented in the public sphere (Lovenduski, 2008). Women's movements have also been influential in raising



awareness and pressuring governments to adopt certain laws, policies and programs (Tierney, 1982). For example, in Turkey, the women's movement has succeeded in raising awareness on such issues as domestic violence, homicides of women, and the need for developing policies to combat violence against women, including women's shelters; however, the movement and civil societies have not developed to the point that they have the means to pressure the state to work for this cause.

This study has revealed two other factors that are a hindrance to the advancement of combating violence against women through the establishment of women's shelters. One of these concerns the difficulty of keeping shelters secure in a society in which the "honor" of the man and the family requires keeping the woman under control, preferably at home away from the gaze of other males. The fact that men in the family go to shelters determined to find their wives and daughters, and that other men in the neighborhood or within the police force tend to act in solidarity with those who are intent on searching for their women, makes it difficult to run shelters. In such a social context, the authorities who have the duty to ensure the security of women's shelters feel burdened by this responsibility. One crucial finding of this study is that there is a lack of means and measures to ensure the security of shelters and the task of doing so is fraught with difficulties.

The second factor hindering the establishment and running of women's shelters has to do with recent changes aimed at reducing the size of the state's workforce. Rather than employing full-time social workers who would have lifelong careers as public employees, the state has been trying to outsource the social services that it has a responsibility to provide as a social state. In such a context of change, the establishment of a mechanism that will coordinate the resources required for the establishment and maintenance of women's shelters is likely to become even more difficult because of an increasing shortage of fully committed, trained employees in the public sector.

The problem of gender-based violence is related to the lower status and disadvantaged position that women have in patriarchal societies. Women not only suffer from violence, they also disproportionately suffer from a lack of education, discrimination at the workplace, and poverty. Cultivating a culture that prioritizes the protection of women's rights, including their right to live free from violence, and women's well-being rather than the integrity of the traditional family unit is not an easy task, and such a difficult challenge requires a women's ministry that is established to work toward this objective. Without the development of such awareness at the level of the state and society, institutionalization of women's shelters in Turkey does not seem likely.

Although the establishment of women's shelters is only one of the mechanisms to combat the problem of gender-based violence, it is an essential policy option that needs serious attention while working toward this objective. Shelters are held back by a number of shortcomings, such as a lack of stable funding and provisions for reliable security, as well as a lack of gender-sensitive personnel trained to respond to the needs of women survivors of violence. This research has revealed that there is a need for a center that is in charge of providing coordination and cooperation between all women's shelters and other agencies that provide support services to shelters. The center



could be located within a ministry whose main task is to ameliorate the status of women in society and could be run by a council whose members come from different women's organizations and local government bodies. In light of this, it is quite an unfortunate development that in June 2011, the Turkish government replaced the Ministry of State in Charge of Women's and Family Affairs with the Ministry in Charge of Family Affairs and Social Policy.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article is part of a broader research project funded by Kadir Has University Scientific Research Programme. The ideas expressed here belong solely to the authors.

### Notes

1. The figures are from a newspaper that reported a speech by Aliye Kavaf, the Minister in charge of Women and the Family, at a press conference held on January 2, 2010 in Ankara, Turkey.
2. The General Directorate of Social Services and Protection of Children (*Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu Genel Müdürlüğü* [SHÇEK]) is the state institution responsible for the provision of social services to the elderly, the disabled, orphans, and other vulnerable social groups, including female survivors of violence. SHÇEK is an organ of the Ministry of State in Charge of Women's and Family Affairs. Although the General Directorate is located in Ankara, it is represented throughout the country through the Provincial Directorates of Social Services in each province, which are responsible for women's shelters. The ministry has another division that is specifically concerned with women's affairs, the General Directorate on the Status of Women (*Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü* [KSGM]), but women's shelters are directly affiliated with SHÇEK rather than KSGM.
3. Every year since 1998, the Women's Shelters Annual Congress gathers representatives from political parties, women's organizations, and municipalities as well as officials from KSGM and SHÇEK to discuss problems related with women's shelters and counseling centers. Our research team participated in two of these congresses, those held in Van in 2008 and in Adana in 2009. We conducted some of the interviews there because it was convenient to make contact with many SHÇEK staff working at state-run women's shelters attending the meeting.
4. At this point, it is important to note that the comments of the SHÇEK employees used in this study do not reflect the official viewpoint of the institution.
5. For the excerpts from the interviews, we use the format of first quotation followed by the type of office, name of the office, location and the interviewee's position at the office.
6. The 4320 Law on the Protection of Family states that a husband who perpetrates violence against the wife or children may be forbidden to approach the residence of the woman

and the children for a certain period of time, and any attempt by him to get near the residence will be restricted by police control. Implementation of the law has remained limited. Furthermore, jurisdiction of the law has applied only to couples who are officially married and excludes out-of-wedlock relationships or religious marriages that are not certified by the state. This decreases the effectiveness of the law, since there are many women in Turkey who were married in a religious (and thus legally nonbinding) wedding ceremony.

## References

- Altınay, A., & Arat, Y. (2008). *Türkiye’de kadına yönelik şiddet* [Violence against women in Turkey]. İstanbul, Turkey: Punto Baskı Çözümleri.
- Ergöçmen, B., Üner, S., Abbasoğlu, A., & Gökçen, C. (2009). *Kadınların Aile İçi Şiddetle Mücadelesi. Türkiye’de Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet Araştırması 2008* [Fight domestic violence against women. Research on domestic violence against women in Turkey 2008]. Ankara, Turkey: T. C. Başbakanlık Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, ICON-Institut Public Sector GmbH and BNB Danışmanlık. Retrieved from [http://www.ksgm.gov.tr/tdvaw/doc/Ana\\_Rapor\\_Mizan\\_1.pdf](http://www.ksgm.gov.tr/tdvaw/doc/Ana_Rapor_Mizan_1.pdf)
- European Commission. (2009, October 14). *Turkey 2009 progress report, accompanying the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010, SEC(2009)1334*. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2009/tr\\_rapport\\_2009\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2009/tr_rapport_2009_en.pdf).
- Ferraro, K. J. (2005). Policing women battering. In C. M. Renzetti & R. K. Bergen (Eds.), *Violence against women* (pp. 191-206). Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hagemann-White C., & Bohn, S. (2007). *Protecting women against violence: Analytical study on the effective implementation of recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence in Council of Europe member states*. Strasbourg, Sweden: Council of Europe, Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs, Gender Equality and Anti-Trafficking Division.
- International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights. (2000). *Women 2000: An investigation into the status of women's rights in the former Soviet Union and Central and South-Eastern Europe—Turkey*. Retrieved from [www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/Woman\\_2000.pdf](http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/Woman_2000.pdf).
- Jansen, H.A.F.M., Yüksel, İ., & Çağatay, P. (2009). *Kadına Yönelik Şiddetin Yaygınlığı. Türkiye’de Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet Araştırması 2008* [Prevalence of violence against women. Research on domestic violence against women in Turkey 2008]. Ankara, Turkey: T. C. Başbakanlık Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, ICON-Institut Public Sector GmbH and BNB Danışmanlık. Retrieved from [http://www.ksgm.gov.tr/tdvaw/doc/Ana\\_Rapor\\_Mizan\\_1.pdf](http://www.ksgm.gov.tr/tdvaw/doc/Ana_Rapor_Mizan_1.pdf)
- Loseke, D. R., & Cahill, S. E. (2005). The social construction of deviance: Experts on battered women. In C. M. Renzetti & R. K. Bergen (Eds.), *Violence against women* (pp. 223-242). Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lovenduski, J. (2008). State feminism and women’s movements. *West European Politics*, 31(1-2), 169-194.
- Schneider, E. M. (2000). *Battered women and feminist lawmaking*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Şiddet gören kadına yeni hayat. (2010, January 3). *Haberturk daily*. Retrieved from <http://haberturk.com/yasam/haber/197853-siddet-goren-kadina-yeni-hayat>

- Stanko, E. A. (1990). Fear of crime and the myth of the safe home: A feminist critique of criminology. In K. Yllö & M. Bograd (Eds.), *Feminist perspectives on wife abuse* (pp. 75-88). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- T. C. Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı. (2008). *Töre ve Namus Cinayetleri Raporu* [Report of honor crimes]. Retrieved from [http://www.kamer.org.tr/tore\\_namus\\_cinayetleri\\_raporu\\_02\\_07\\_2008.pdf](http://www.kamer.org.tr/tore_namus_cinayetleri_raporu_02_07_2008.pdf)
- Tezcan, S., Yavuz, S., & Tunçkanat, H. (2009). *Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet ve Sağlık Sonuçları. Türkiye’de Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet Araştırması 2008* [Domestic violence against women and health outcomes. Research on domestic violence against women in Turkey 2008]. Ankara, Turkey: T. C. Başbakanlık Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, ICON-Institut Public Sector GmbH and BNB Danışmanlık. Retrieved from [http://www.ksqm.gov.tr/tdvaw/doc/Ana\\_Rapor\\_Mizan\\_1.pdf](http://www.ksqm.gov.tr/tdvaw/doc/Ana_Rapor_Mizan_1.pdf)
- Tierney, K. J. (1982). The battered women movement and the creation of the wife beating problem. *Social Problems*, 29, 207-220.
- TBMM Araştırma Komisyon Raporu. (2006). *Töre ve Namus Cinayetleri ile Kadınlara ve Çocuklara Yönelik Şiddetin Sebeplerinin Araştırılarak Alınması Gereken Önlemlerin Belirlenmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırması Komisyon Raporu* [Honor crimes and violence against women and children established in order to determine the measures to be taken investigating reasons (Parliamentary Research Commission Report)]. Retrieved from [http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/ARASTIRMA\\_ONERGESI\\_GD.onerge\\_bilgileri?kanunlar\\_sira\\_no=416](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/ARASTIRMA_ONERGESI_GD.onerge_bilgileri?kanunlar_sira_no=416).
- Women Against Violence Europe. (1998). *Wave report*. Vienna, Austria: Austrian Women’s Shelter Network.
- Yıldırım, A. (1998). *Sıradan şiddet: Kadına ve çocuğa yönelik şiddetin toplumsal kaynakları* [Ordinary violence: Violence against women and children, community resources]. İstanbul, Turkey: Boyut Yayıncılık.

## Author Biographies

**Cagla Diner** is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of Kadir Has University. She received her MA and PhD in sociology from Johns Hopkins University in 2009 with the dissertation she wrote on economic decision-making processes as shaped by local and global experts, bureaucrats, and politicians. She is currently working as part of a research team on a project that explores the women’s movement in Turkey. Her recent publication on feminism in Turkey appeared in the *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*.

**Şule Toktaş** is an associate professor of political science in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of Kadir Has University. She received her MSc in gender and women’s studies from Middle East Technical University, and PhD in political science from Bilkent University. Her research interests are international migration, women’s studies, and ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey. She received the Scientific and Technological Research Council (TUBITAK) Award for Young Scientists in 2009. Her recent article on Turkey’s EU membership process appeared in *Political Science Quarterly*.